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ABSTRACT

The paper addresses issues in libraries' architectural accessibility for disabled students. A history of awareness regarding accessibility is recounted and the increased acknowledgement of need for services for disabled persons is underlined. The author points out steps that may be undertaken to provide accessibility in ways other than major structural efforts, such as understanding subtle barriers and altering them. The installation of accessible telephones is cited as one example. (CL)

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WILSO

LIBRARY ACCESSIBILITY

Written for the Conference on Academic Library Services to Disabled Students, May 6-7, 1983, Tallahassee, Florida, at The Florida State University.

Often one of the most challenging tasks for a speech writer is deciphering the title of the speech as listed on the program. In this case, of course, there should be no problem. We know what LIBRARY means, and we know what ACCESSIBILITY means. Or do we? What does it mean to you? Give me some word associations for accessibility _____ (Handicapped/disabled/impaired, ramps, wheelchairs, crutches, doors, steps, bathrooms, telephones, ...) But we should think of people, needs, help, information, librarians (because without librarians a library isn't accessible to anyone). Since my research recently has been on architectural accessibility, this is the segment of accessibility that I want to talk about today.

Although we think of the seventies as the time when work was begun to remove architectural barriers, as early as 1947 Dr. Timothy Nugent began a program to accept disabled students on the campus of the University of Illinois. During an interview with Dr. Nugent in 1981, he said that in the forties the general public felt that people who were "crippled" should stay at home where someone could care for them. It was inconceivable that a person in a wheelchair could be independent enough to live alone or shop in a store or attend college. However "since 1959, Illinois has had an average of 225-250 severely physically disabled full-time residential students per year."[1]

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

When I was a librarian at the University of Illinois in 1960, the big blue and orange buses with lifts for wheelchairs were a common sight on the campus streets.

But this was not the first time the needs of disabled students were realized because the "Statistical Report for the Year Ending June 30,1938" from the Braille Transcribing Section of the Library of Congress notes that "this service was rendered to approximately 210 students in 69 high schools and colleges, located in 39 cities, and 20 states."[2]

In the Background Paper on Architectural Barriers prepared by Dr. Nugent for the White House Conference on Handicapped Individuals in 1977, he lists these important dates in the history of the barrier-free movement:

1959 Meeting of interested individuals from the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, the National Society for Crippled Children and Adults and the American Standards Association (ASA) (now the American National Standards Institute) who began the program designated Project A117 of the ASA "Making Buildings and Facilities Accessible to, and Usable by, the Physically Handicapped."
1964 First National Institute on Architectural Barriers, Chicago.
1965 National Commission on Architectural Barriers to the Rehabilitation of the Handicapped, authorized by Congress.

Some important early publications were the reports from the National League of Cities in 1967 ("State and Local Efforts to Eliminate Architectural Barriers to the Handicapped"), from the National Citizens Conference on the Rehabilitation of the Disabled and Disadvantaged in 1969 ("People Power"), and from the American Institute of Architects in 1970 ("A. I. A. Barrier Free Architecture Workshop Program").[3]

The meetings and activities of these groups paved the way for the progress of the seventies, such as the passing of the

Rehabilitation Acts of 1973 and 1974, and the creation by Congress of the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board in 1973. "The Board was established primarily to ensure compliance with the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968. But since its establishment the Board's role has grown significantly."[4] In 1978 it was estimated that "nearly a half million buildings and facilities fall within the A&TBCB's jurisdiction."[5]

Awareness of the need for accessibility on the campus paralleled the nationwide interest. Martha Ross Redden in her report "Access on America's Campuses" states: "A few schools pioneered in providing services for disabled students. The Universities of Illinois, Kentucky, and California, for example, set up offices to manage access issues. These and several other campuses began to make structural changes in buildings... But the great majority of campuses still felt no obligation to provide access, and simply referred applicants to the few campuses that had programs."[6]

In 1960 Dr. Nugent, Director of the Rehabilitation Education Center at the University of Illinois, felt: "Professionals in the field of rehabilitation are...finding it very difficult to project clients into normal situations of education, recreation, and employment because of architectural barriers."[7] But as early as 1964 "200 colleges across the nation had modified their campuses or buildings in various ways and to varying degrees to accommodate physically disabled students."[8] In 1977 a Conference on Disabled Students on American Campuses "marked a milestone in the development of services to

disabled college students by gathering together participants from all over the country to discuss needs of the disabled in terms of programs and facilities."[9] The library, being the "heart of the university",[10] suddenly was required to acknowledge the needs of these new patrons, and to develop the means for meeting these needs.

Today academic librarians have a different point of view; we are accustomed to seeing disabled individuals in the stores, at concerts, and in the library. We see headlines in newspapers and articles in popular magazines such as the recent one in Family Weekly, "At long last, help for 40 million handicapped" which included a picture of a young man in a wheelchair staring up at other young people walking up a long flight of stairs. The picture was captioned: "Although the Government is battling barriers to the handicapped, many steps remain."[11](Pun probably intended)

Several reasons are offered for the larger number of disabled people in our society and therefore in our colleges: recent forward strides in medical technology,[12] improved high school curricula,[13] and federal legislation requiring accessibility of public buildings to the disabled.[14] Jim and Carol Thomas in their book Academic Library Facilities and Services for the Handicapped have assembled an impressive list of colleges and universities in the United States with libraries that have made services to the disabled a part of their program.[15] Some librarians who responded to the questionnaires sent by the Thomases had a special title (for example, Sam Huang from Northern Illinois University whose title is Librarian

for Services to Physically Impaired)[16] and others were reference librarians or administrators. The responses to the "checklist on accessibility of the library facility and special equipment available"[17] does give an indication of how easily a handicapped student could use the library but should not be considered a complete picture of the extent of programs and facilities available or the number of students served. Although some of the listings are quite long, the entries for the University of Illinois and Southern Illinois University at Carbondale are shorter in length (four and five inches in length respectively)[18] and I know from personal experience that these two campuses have large disabled student populations. (I can hear Jim saying now that they print what they receive.) However, the fact that a library representative responded and the library is included in this excellent directory shows the desire to provide library services to disabled students.

Another demonstration of current awareness was the organization of the ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS ASSISTING THE DISABLED DISCUSSION GROUP during the American Library Association meeting in Philadelphia in July 1982. This group is authorized by the Library Services to the Blind and Physically Handicapped Section of the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies Division of ALA.[19]

The fact that college and university librarians of the eighties acknowledge the need for service to disabled students is important. But as stated in the introduction to Planning Barrier Free Libraries prepared by the National Library Service: "Librarians know program goals--not architecture."[20]

Another consideration is provided by Stephen Cotler and Alfred DeGraff in Architectural Accessibility for the Disabled of College Campuses: "No longer can accessible construction requirements be based solely on the massive upper-limb strength of the paraplegic who, in standard-sized wheelchairs, dominated the wheelchair population on college campuses in the 1950's and 1960's. Today, it is more likely that over half of the wheelchair students on a campus are quadriplegics with limited arm strength and larger, motorized wheelchairs."[21] And we might add, they have many other types of disabilities. The outlook on accessibility has changed.

In fact, Ralph Ellsworth's 1973 book on Academic Library Buildings includes one page entitled "Paraplegics--Provisions for" (which shows four pictures of how not to do it) followed by six pages on "Exhibitions--Facilities" (which show attractive exhibit cases).[22] But in 1965, Keyes Metcalf said that "Almost any library can expect sooner or later to have handicapped persons among its clientele" and listed in the index three different places with information on handicapped persons.[23] In the past few years many books and articles on planning campus and library facilities to make them accessible have been published. A 1979 book Designing and Space Planning for Libraries lists seven references to "Handicapped, library considerations for."[24]

If the architecture of the library determines accessibility, how can we "ordinary" librarians assist in providing accessibility? We probably can't tear down the building and start at the beginning; we must learn to operate on a different level.

I want to ask each of you to become a member of AA -- ACCESSIBILITY AWARENESS. As in other parts of our daily life, little things mean a lot. Providing accessibility can consist of small actions such as keeping the aisles in the bookstacks clear of stepstools. What is needed is awareness.

As new AA members, first we must establish our goals. Richard Bopp,from the University of Illinois, in a recent article "Assisting Library Users Who are Disabled" says: "I have been a librarian in public services for five years and a paraplegic for fourteen years. As a librarian, I know that we want all of our users to feel welcome and comfortable in our libraries; as a disabled person, I know that attention to details of interior design and an examination of our attitudes toward people with disabilities are critical to meeting this goal."[25] Jan Ames, Chair of the Library Service to the Blind and Physically Handicapped Section of ASCLA, reminds us that "The ultimate goal is to provide handicapped individuals access to the same information available to other (non-impaired) readers."[26] This first step is probably the easiest.

Next we must assess the problem. Kieth Wright in his chapter on "The Library's Role in Accessibility" from the book Library and Information Services for Handicapped Individuals sets the frame work for beginning to think about accessibility: "A first priority in any library planning of facilities, programs or modifications in relation to physically handicapped individuals is to educate the library staff to both the obvious and not so obvious barriers."[27] Here is a chance for the AA members to begin their activity -- with the not-so-obvious. In many publications there are examples of surveys you can use

to evaluate the level of accessibility in your own library: for example in Joan Goddard's article on "Architectural Barriers" in the Fall 1973 issue of News Notes of California Libraries;[28] in William Needham's article on "Academis Library Service to Handicapped Students" in the November 1977 Journal of Academic Librarianship;[29] and in the 1981 directory by the Thomases. At the workshop on "Breaking Down Barriers" held at the University of Illinois in 1981,[30] Phyllis Self listed two state guides to accessibility standards: Access for All: An Illustrated Handbook of Barrier Free Design for Ohio[31] and the state of Illinois publication Accessibility Standards Illustrated.[32] You can also consult my bibliography on Accessibility on the Campus[33] published by Vance Bibliographies in 1982 and read from the literature to learn what has been and is being done on campuses all over the country.

But one of the most important actions for a new AA member is to look around in your own library. How many disabled students come into your library? Which of the three types of disabilities do they have: sensory impairment (blindness and deafness), mobility impairment (paralysis -or difficulty in walking-), or dexterity impairment(amputation, arthritis, deformity)?[34] Has your library provided services and facilities for these students and do the physical surroundings make it possible for them to use the library with ease? Do they feel comfortable in the library so that they come in to study and meet their friends? Are there tables for the students who use wheelchairs, are there waterfountains, and restrooms and telephones? Can the pencil sharpener be reached

from a wheelchair? Many of the adaptations are not as expensive as was originally expected when the laws were passed.[35]

Finally we AA members must take what action we can. My current campaign is to bring about the installation of an accessible telephone. The caption of a recent article in the Southern Illinoisian read: "Some walls down, but the handicapped still face barriers."[36] Steinfeld in Access to the Built Environment states: "The task which faces us is to design truly responsive environments where all people have opportunities to develop competence... Environmental modification will not eliminate the stigma of disability. It will, however, decrease that stigma to the degree that it increases the person's environmental competence."[37] It is my contention as a librarian who works on a campus which has a disabled student population of approximately 300 (mostly mobility impaired) that there are ways which we can make our libraries more physically accessible without major architectural changes. I want to show you some examples in a slide presentation. I have distributed a sheet showing the comparison of the good points and the bad points discovered during this mini-survey of my library. I hope this will help you in taking a good look at your library; it was an eye-opening experience for me!

But let me reemphasize my charge to the members of the ACCESSIBILITY AWARENESS team. I'm quoting from an article in the Spring 1980 issue of Human Rights: "We need to understand that disability does not mean inability."[38]

I can't resist closing by sharing with you a quote from a paper presented by Dr. Nugent to the British Council for Rehabilitation of the Disabled in 1965: "Someone once said that wisdom is knowing what to do, skill is knowing how to do it, and virtue is in getting the job done. I am certain that, among those, present, there is an overabundance of wisdom and skill. It is to virtue that I challenge each and every one of you, each in your own way, in your own communities"[39] (and if I might to presume to alter any statement by Dr. Nugent) and in your own libraries.

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ACCESSIBILITY AT MORRIS LIBRARY
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale
July 1982/May 1983

AIDS TO ACCESSIBILITY

1. Mostly accessible campus.
2. Handicapped parking spaces near library.
3. Ramp from parking lot.
4. Swing gate at security exit.
5. Ramp up to front porch. Back exit is level.
6. Helpful librarians and library staff!
7. Periodical indexes shelved on low tables.
8. Elevators. One set of control buttons is lowered. Permanent metal braille labels attached inside and outside all elevators.
9. Where turnstile is used for reserve area, a chain is provided to allow access.
10. New photocopy machines are lower. One change machine is now accessible.
11. Access provided to media services by using key.
12. Lowered water fountains.
13. Enlarged door to rest rooms. Curtained stall is provided.
14. Special carrels for use by disabled (primarily for reading to blind).
15. Each floor has at least one table raised on blocks to make it accessible to persons in wheelchairs.
16. Handout about disabled available on bottom level of handout rack.
17. Special Services Room has Kurzweil, Visualtek, Brailler, Braille books and periodicals. Headphones and cassette machine are available.
18. Specialized Student Services will provide assistance for lengthly library research projects.
19. Accessible book return slot at the circulation desk.
20. Big buttons to open electric doors at front and back entrances.

LACK OF ACCESSIBILITY

1. LCS terminals for catalog data are too high except for one in the central catalog area.
2. Periodical index volumes are too heavy, too hard to reach if at back of table or on top shelf of index table.
3. Stools and wastebaskets are hazards.
4. Elevator cars in one set of elevators is not deep enough for some electric chairs.
5. Arrangement of furniture may cause problems.
6. The chain provided when turnstile is a barrier is marked "STAFF ONLY".
7. Typing rooms are too small.
8. Pencil machine is too high.
9. Pencil sharpeners should be lowered.
10. Microfiche reader for phone books is placed too high.
11. No accessible phones.
12. Non-extended stair railings.

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A BRIEF BIBLIOGRAPHY ON LIBRARY ACCESSIBILITY

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(Photocopied from the working copy/printed without call numbers)

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SIU - qR027.663/A168

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SIU - K/ HH1.2:En8/4

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SIU - 378.1962/C724a/1976

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SIU - 027.6/W951l